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DEVELOPMENT OF FORESTS, LUMBER INDUSTRY IN BULGARIA

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The forests of Bulgaria cover 3,621,000 hectares, or 33 percent of the total area of the country. Lumber stocks at present are estimated at 210 million cubic meters and the annual increase at 9.7 million cubic meters.

Deciduous forests are predominant throughout the country and account for 70 percent of its entire forest area. Coniferous trees are found only in the mountains.

According to their nature, Bulgarian forests may be classed into five zones:

1. In the hill and valley zone (up to 750 meters above sea level), groups of forests are located in the river valleys and along the Black Sea coast. They include the forests of Deli-Orman, Longus, and Genisht-Ada, consisting of oak, hornbeam, ash, walnut, maple, linden, poplar, aspen, and willow, etc. Swamp-lands in this area are overgrown with crack willow, and the hills are mostly covered with bushes.

2. In the foothill zone (750-850 meters above sea level), beech and oak are predominant, but the beech forests are sometimes mixed with pine and spruce.

3. In the mountain zone of medium elevation (850-1,250 meters above sea level), beech forests are predominant with a mixture of oak, ash, hornbeam, etc.

4. In the high mountain zone (Rila Planina, the Rhodopes, Stara Planina, and others, at 1,250-2,000 meters above sea level), forests along the lower slopes consist almost exclusively of beech, mixed with pine, spruce, fir, etc. In the higher areas coniferous, especially pine forests are predominant, but above 1,750 meters there is almost nothing but pine brush. In the deciduous forests of this zone, mainly located on the northern slopes of the Stara Planina, the vegetation consists of beech (45 percent) and oaks (35 percent), supplemented by a few other varieties of deciduous trees. Coniferous forests are found mainly in Rila Planina and in the Rhodopes.

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5. The alpine zone has scarcely any forestation. The few trees of this area, pine and dwarf juniper, are typically alpine, with gnarled trunks and widespread crowns.

Under the law of 16 December 1947 providing for the nationalization of Bulgarian forests, 82 percent of the country's forests became state property. The limit for private forest property was established at 5-10 hectares. Bulgarian forestry suffered heavy damages during World War II, but the present regime is endeavoring to re-establish better conditions by an efficient forestry program. The entire forest economy is supervised by the Ministry of Forests, whereas the direct management is handled by the "State Forests" organization.

"State Forests" consists of 27 control and supervisory offices (rayon administrations) and 260 production enterprises; in addition, it includes a large number of shipping enterprises, sales organizations, and work brigades which measure the lumber, carry out forestation, build roads, etc. The enterprises deliver the lumber to temporary storage yards located along the highways or to lumber mills and railroad stations.

The Bulgarian government has accomplished the following: Between 1947 and 1948 it increased the number of seedlings from 67.4 to 210 million; through reforestation and other measures, it expanded the forest area by 37,200 hectares in 1947, and by 130,000 hectares in 1948. Forest roads are constantly being extended. During 1947 and 1948, 88,600 hectares of land with sparse forestation or none at all, ravines, river banks, and damaged forests were artificially reforested.

The Five-Year Plan provides for meeting the steadily increasing demand for lumber as extensively as possible. For that purpose, as well as to improve the quality of lumber, various new measures are gradually being introduced. Thus, the plan provides for drainage of swamplands, reforestation of destroyed forests, afforestation of new areas, as well as for the rejuvenation of old plantings. In the main agricultural areas, especially in the Dobrudzha, the plan provides for the establishment of protective forest belts on a total area of 3,200 hectares.

Felling increased considerably under the Two-Year Plan. As compared to 3,345,000 cubic meters of wood felled in 1937, of which 2,665,000 were firewood and 680,000 timber, in 1948 felling reached 5,250,000 [sic] cubic meters, of which 3,750,000 were firewood and 1,550,000 timber. Thus the share of timber in the total amount of felled wood rose almost 1½ times in the period between 1937 and 1948.

The Five-Year Plan also provides that at the end of 1953, timber-felling shall exceed the rate of 1948 by 228 percent, whereas firewood-felling shall exceed that rate only twice. The slower expansion of firewood production is compensated by the simultaneous increase of brown and black coal production, which will gradually replace wood fuel. The increase in felling is fully warranted by Bulgaria's forest reserves, and will still remain 30-40 percent below its potential limit.

To intensify wood production and reduce the cost of cutting, shipping, etc., the Five-Year Plan provides for the following measures: (1) the use of mechanical saws (electric and gasoline-driven), and the use of trucks, prime movers, and tractors for removal; (2) the construction of 2,050 kilometers of new forest roads, the improvement of the existing road system, and the installation of narrow-gauge railroads, funiculars, etc; (3) the construction of yards, barns, dwellings, garages, auto-repair shops, bakeries, stores, bathhouses, etc., in forest areas.

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Sawing is the most important branch of the Bulgarian lumber industry, followed by the veneer, crate, parquet, and furniture industries. At the time of the nationalization, the country had 1,202 sawmills, most of them small enterprises equipped to handle less than 1,000 cubic meters. Only 141 among them could really be considered industrial enterprises, but even most of these had only one or two saw frames; only five of the mills had three saw frames, and one had six. The total capacity of these mills was 2 million cubic meters, working on two shifts.

Furthermore, Bulgaria had eight plywood-veneer factories producing about 25,000 cubic meters of finished products, and five single-layer veneer factories with a yearly production capacity of about 6.5 million square meters (3.5 million sheets) of veneer. Parquet was manufactured in nine factories producing jointly about 300,000 square meters yearly. Crate production reached about 10 million units yearly, and about 1.5 million barrels also were manufactured per year.

A large share of Bulgarian lumber is used by handicraft enterprises which concentrate on the production of wooden carts, barrels, furniture, domestic appliances, kitchen utensils, etc. Most of this work is done by hand; only a few of the enterprises use machines. Most woodworking enterprises are located in the vicinity of forests, rivers, or railroads, comparatively far from consumption centers. The goals of the Two-Year Plan were exceeded and many new woodworking enterprises were established during that period; 16 furniture factories and five veneer factories were expanded and reorganized.

The wood production plan of 1947-48 was fulfilled by 165 percent; in 1948 total wood production exceeded 1947 by 20.5 percent and 1939 by 65.5 percent. The greatest progress for the 1939 - 1948 period was achieved by the woodworking industry, and the Five-Year Plan provides for further expansion in that branch. At the end of 1953, woodworking, cellulose, and paper production will exceed the 1939 volume by 3.5 times.

The development of the chemical wood products industry is of great importance for the country, because of the fact that a great part of the forests consist of low-trunk vegetation, which is especially adaptable for chemical processing.

Charcoal is produced for export and domestic consumption. Before the war, the country annually used about 500,000 cubic meters of wood, which produced about 50,000 tons of charcoal. At present, charcoal is produced mostly in the area of Strandzha /Straza? Mountain. Besides charcoal, the Bulgarian chemical wood products industry manufactures turpentine, rosin, acetic acid, acetone, etc. The Five-Year Plan provides for a substantial increase of chemical wood products enterprises.

The foreign trade in wood, cellulose, and paper articles was very low in capitalist Bulgaria, amounting to one percent of the total export figures and 1.5 percent of imports; the latter was limited to coniferous round timber while export was concentrated mainly on charcoal. Although, shortly before World War II, the import of paper pulp reached the relatively high figure of 15,000 tons, during the war foreign trade in wood, cellulose, and paper goods dropped rapidly, to rise again after the end of hostilities. At present, round timber is no longer imported. Export trade is still concentrated mainly on charcoal; veneer, parquet, steamed beech lumber, barrels, and a few other products have been added to the export list.

The Five-Year Plan provides for further extension and development of Bulgarian forestry and wood industry.

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